

## Message Text

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44

ACTION ARA-10

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P 261710Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3986

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 4024

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652 - GDS

TAGS: PFOR, ES

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT MOLINA AND THE USG

REF: STATE 209707

1. SUMMARY: IN CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT MOLINA OCTOBER 24, HE FRANKLY CHARACTERIZED US/SALVADORAN RELATIONS IN THE RECENT PAST AS "LUKEWARM" BUT EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE IN IMPROVEMENT. MOLINA'S CONCERN THAT US SUPPORT FOR HIS GOVERNMENT HAS WANED STEMS PRIMARILY FROM THE WASHINGTON LEAK ABOUT GOES PURCHASE OF ISRAELI JETS. THE QUESTION OF US ATTITUDE TOWARD HIS REGIME HAS TAKEN ON NEW IMPORTANCE IN MOLINA'S MIND AT THIS TIME SINCE HE MAY FEEL THAT THIS HAS ENTERED INTO THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL EQUATION, EFFECTING HIS ABILITY TO DEAL WITH SUCH PROBLEMS AS THE ONDURAS/ EL SALVADOR DISPUTE AND PERHAPS AGRARIAN REFORM. CLOSER INFORMAL TIES WITH THE PRESIDENT, WHICH WE HAVE LONG SOUGHT, MAY BE A GREATER POSSIBILITY AS A RESULT OF THESE EVENTS. IN THE MEANTIME WE SHOULD CAREFULLY AVOIDS ACTIONS OR COMMENTS AT THIS TIME OHAT COULD BE MISCONSTRUED AS FURTHER EVIDENCE OF COOLNESS TOWARD THE GOES. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCOMPANIED BY THE USMILGP COMMANDER, HIS AIR FORCE SECTIONO  
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CHIEF, AND A RAPRESENTATIVE OF THE SALVADORAN AIR FORCE, I

MET WITH PRESIDENT MOLINA AFTERNOON OF OCTOBER 24 TO PRESENT HIM WITH A MOMENTO OF THE VISIT OF THE USAF THUNDERBIRD TEAM. ATMOSPHERE WAS CORDIAL BUT CONVERSATION WAS NECESSARILY LIMITED BY THE PRESENCE OF THE OTHERS.

3. I TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO INFORM THE PRESIDENT, AS IT HAD EARLIER INFORMED THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, OF OUR ACCEPTANCE OF DR BETRAND GALINDO AS EL SALVADOR'S NEW AMBASSADOR TO THE US. MOLINA WAS PLEASED BY THE NEWS AND THEN COMMENTED THAT HE HOPED THIS WOULD IMPROVE RELATIONS BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES WHICH HE FRANKLY DESCRIBED AS "LUKEWARM" IN THE RECENT PAST. THROUGHOUT OUR BRIEF MEETING, HOWEVER, HE WAS PERSONALLY MOST FRIENDLY AND SEEMED SINCERE IN HIS INTEREST IN IMPROVING THE CLIMATE OF RELATIONS.

4. COMMENT: MOLINA'S CONCERN WHICH PROMPTED THE DESPATCH OF HIS SPECIAL EMISSARY ORTIZ MANCIA TO MEET WITH DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOWDLER, STEMS PRINCIPALLY FROM THE USG LEAK ABOUT SALVADORAN PLANS TO PURCHASE ISRAELI JETS. IT MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN FURTHERED BY A BRIEF UPI STORY CONCERNING AMBASSADOR CATTO'S RADIO INTERVIEW AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITY WHICH REPORTED, OUT OF CONTEXT, HIS COMMENT THAT SOME DEVELOPMENTALISTS FEEL THAT FOREIGN ASSISTANCE SHOULD BE WITHHELD FROM COUNTRIES THAT DO NOTHING ABOUT THEIR POPULATION PROBLEM. (WE HAVE JUST OBTAINED A COMPLETE TAPE OF THAT INTERVIEW, WHICH PLACES HIS COMMENTS IN PERSPECTIVE, AND ARE SENDING IT TO MOLINA, AT HIS REQUEST, AND TO ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER CASTANEDA). ADDED TO THESE EVENTS WAS THE WAITING PERIOD REQUIRED TO OBTAIN THE AGREEMENT FOR DR BETRAND GALINDO WHICH WAS EVIDENTLY TAKEN BY SOME IN THE GOES AS A SIGN OF USG INDIFFERENCE TO EL SALVADOR.

5. THE INTERESTING QUESTION IS WHY THE PRESIDENT SHOULD RECENTLY HAVE BEGUN FOCUSING ON THE STATE OF US/SALVADORAN RELATIONS AND TO FEEL THE NEED FOR REASSURANCE ABOUT OUR ATTITUDE. THE VIEWS OF THE USG HAVE GENERALLY, NOT UNTIL NOW, BEEN A MATTER OF OVERRIDING CONCERN TO MOLINA. OF COURSE, HE HAS ALWAYS BEEN CORDIAL TOWARD US AND NO DOUBT RATES US HIGH ON HIS SCALE OF INTERNATIONAL CONCERNS. BASICALLY, HOWEVER, HIS ATTENTION DURING THE FIRST 15

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MONTHS OF HIS ADMINISTRATION HAS BEEN DEVOTED TO INTERNAL QUESTIONS AND TO THE VARIOUS DOMESTIC INSTITUTIONS AND SECTORS THAT PLAY ON HIS POLICIES (E.G. THE PRIVATE BUSINESS SECTOR, THE MILITARY, THE CHURCH, LABOR, CAMPESINOS). WHAT MAY BE OCCURRING NOW IS THAT MOLINA BELIEVES THAT THE ATTITUDE OF THE USG HAS BECOME A FACTOR IN THE DOMESTIC EQUATION. HE MAY FEEL, FOR INSTANCE, THAT HIS INABILITY TO OBTAIN JET AIRCRAFT FROM THE US ON PREFERENTIAL

TERMS HAS WEAKENED HIS POSITION WITH THE MILITARY, THAT HE CANNOT COUNT ENTIRELY ON THEIR SUPPORT FOR ALL OF HIS PROGRAMS. WITH THE CONSERVATIVE PRIVATE SECTOR, HE MAY BELIEVE THAT ANY REAL OR IMAGINED SIGNSPOF US WITHDRAWAL OF SUPPORT FOR HIS GOVT WOULD WEAKEN HIS ABILITY TO PROCEED WITH CONTROVERSIAL PLANS SUCH AS AGRARIAN REFORM. AND ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE, HE PROBABLY FEARS THAT A SEEMING DETERIORATION OF RELATIONS WITH THE USG WOULD HINDER HIS ABILITY TO ARRIVE AT A SETTLEMENT WITH HONDURAS SINCE THE LATTER WOULD BE EXPECTED TO BE LESS INCLINED TO COMPROMISE IF IT CONSTRUED THAT THE USGOV IS DOWN ON HIM. (ON THE LATTER POINT, HE MAY WELL SUSPECT THAT THE AIRCRAFT PURCHASE LEAK WAS A DELIBERATE PLOY BY WASHINGTON TO UNDERCUT HIM AT THE MEXICO TALKS AND TARNISH HIS IMAGE AT HOME--HENCE ORTIZ MANCIA'S CONTENTION THAT THE DEPARTMENT, FOR ITS OWN POLITICAL PURPOSES, WAS THE REAL SOURCE OF THE JET STORY.)

6. PART OF THE PROBLEM, AS I HAVE EXPLAINED CAREFULLY TO CASTENEDA, STEMS FROM THE LACK OF AN INFORMAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN MOLINA AND THE CHIEF OF THIS MISSION. EL ERLVADOR, OF COURSE, IS NOT LIKE SOME OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE REGION WHICH HAVE A LONG HISTORY OF AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE US CHIEF OF MISSION AND THE CHIEF OF STATE; OUR TIES HERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FRIENDLY AND OPEN BUT SALVADORAN PRESIDENTS HAVE FELT NO OVERWHELMING NEED TO ASSIDUOUSLY CULTIVATE US OR CONSULT OS ON ALL IMPORTANT QUESTIONS, DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN. NONETHELESS, WE HAVE LONG FELT THAT AT LEAST A SOMEWHAT CLOSER PERSONAL CONTACT BETWEEN THE CHIEF OF MISSION AND THE PRESIDENT WOULD BE DESIRABLE, SO THEN  
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